

WESTERN PEOPLE

Supplement to The Western Pr

September 16, 1999



BIRDWATCHER'S FAVORITE
THE COMEBACK OF THE WHOOPING CRANE

WESTERN PEOPLE

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The Harvest Crew

I see the threshing crew come in.
The harvesting is done.
Upon the air, the dust motes drift
Beside the barn, the cows await
Their milking and their hay.
The chickens all have gone to roost.
The daylight fades away.
A door is opened at the house.
The lamplight spills without.
The evening meal is ready now.
A feast, there is no doubt.
And then it's time to say goodbye.
Before the day is new,
They'll travel to a neighbor's farm,
To help that farmer too.
And it will be another year
Before they come again,
To reap their way through fruitful fields
Of ripe and golden grain.
They are a tanned and stalwart group.
Hard workers, every one.
We always miss their smiles and jokes,
When harvesting is done!

— Betty Lou Hebert

COVER PHOTO

Whooping crane. Sask Tourism photo. Story, page 8.

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome

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Dear Reader

Today, Sept. 16, is election day in Saskatchewan. Different people have different reasons for voting for party X, Y or Z. Me, I go for the best slogan. The Liberals' slogan this time around is "The clear choice." The Saskatchewan Party (the Tories, as Roy Romanow impishly calls it) has another three-worder: "The way up." And the New Democrats seem to like the sound of: "Building a bright future together the Saskatchewan way."

None of them takes my breath away. "The clear choice" and "The way up" don't have verbs, for pity's sake. Editors like verbs. The

NDP slogan/mini essay at least has a gerund ("building"), which is a noun trying to be a verb. However, I'm getting tired of building bright futures and would like to live happily in the here and now. Here's my slogan: "Let our kids worry about the future, and if we've messed it up for them, well, we're sorry. Just don't sue us 20 years from now when you're looking for closure."

Too long? Maybe it needs a little work. Speaking of work, the federal New Democrats have their work cut out for them as they try to redefine themselves for the umpteenth time. Maybe I could suggest a few slogans:

1. We don't know where we stand. Just vote for us, OK?

2. A little to the right. A little more. A little more. A little more. No, not that far, you're blocking Mr. Hussein. Say "cheese!"

3. Tommy who?

4. Why can't we all be Liberals?

5. It's not easy trying to fit Alexa McDonough on a lapel button, you know.

6. Let's have a referendum on that!

7. Let's have a judicial inquiry on that!

8. Balanced budgets? How do you turn this calculator on, anyhow?

9. This NDPer walked into a bar. Ouch! It was an iron bar!

Michael Gillgannon

WESTERN PEOPLE

An enigma and a mystery

Column by Verne Clemence

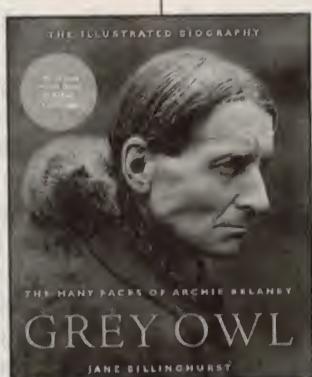
The strange story of Englishman Archie Belaney, alias Grey Owl, conservationist and Native rights advocate, continues to inspire writers, filmmakers and a bemused public.

With a new book out and a movie about to debut near Grey Owl's former wilderness home near Waskesiu, in Prince Albert National Park, the name should stay in lights for some time. That's the hope of Saskatoon writer Jane Billinghurst, author of the new illustrated biography, *Grey Owl: The Many Faces of Archie Belaney*.

Billinghurst's interest in this enigmatic figure from the 1930s dates back to her time as an editor for Prairie Books, and later with Douglas and McIntyre. She helped with the research on the 1990 book, *From the Land of Shadows: The Making of Grey Owl* (Western Producer Prairie Books), the definitive work by Donald B. Smith.

Born and raised in southern England near Belaney's birthplace of Hastings, Billinghurst, 41, felt some kinship to the restless youth who was fascinated by Canada's unspoiled wilderness and the Native way of life.

Her book features 60 vintage photographs of Belaney as a young man, and later in his adopted persona of Grey Owl. She traces the chronology of his life and his attempts to immerse himself in Indian lore and the natural world, and intersperses her own text with excerpts from Grey Owl's



extensive writings.

Though she describes the life of Archie Belaney as a puzzle still, Billinghurst didn't create this particular book to speculate on his motives or ponder the phenomenal response on both sides of the Atlantic to his writings and advocacy for the environment.

She set out to create an accessible version of the Grey Owl story, and to give readers a direct connection to his message by using the excerpts. The result is a classy presentation in a coffee-table format on a man who was ahead of his time with his impassioned pleas to preserve the natural world.

The publisher is Greystone Books, the hardcover price is \$26.95.

Regina lawyer and author Garrett Wilson serves up a different brand of reality in his new mystery novel, *Guilty Addictions*. The book, Wilson's first venture in fiction writing, offers an imaginative agenda of murder, mayhem and corruption in, of all places,

Saskatchewan.

Wilson makes it clear all his characters are products of his imagination, but he also admits freely that he's not just trying to be entertaining. He used fiction as a vehicle to make a very real point, which is

that the 1980s were dark years for this province.

He believes we're too apathetic about the lowering of standards of political debate and behavior during two terms of the Tory government led by Grant Devine. He'd like to issue a wake-up call. His fictional characters don't exactly follow an identical script, but his depictions of corruption in high places, of back-room manipulations, and of the muzzling of the media, all do bear some marks of real events.

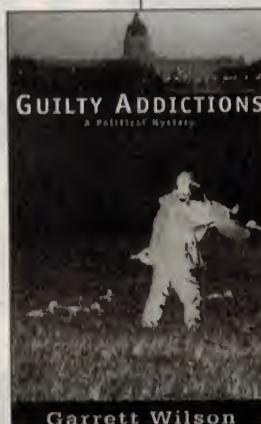
He's written a plausible tale for the most part, amateurish in places — Wilson, 67, wouldn't make it as a romance writer — but

it's enough of a page-turner to hold the reader's interest, even without the Tory scandal connection.

The publisher is NeWest Press, the softcover price \$14.95.

The Saskatchewan Book Awards are scheduled for Nov. 19, with a new feature, a Rural Reading Series. Fir Mountain rancher/poet Thelma Poirier (*Rock Creek*, Coteau Books, 1998) inspired the series and with SaskPower as the sponsor, the first reading is set for noon, Nov. 7 at the National Exhibition Centre in Estevan.

Joanne Bannatyne-Cugnet, author of *A Prairie Alphabet*, will introduce nominated authors from around the province. Tickets are \$10 and can be obtained from Pages and Pages bookstore and Estevan's library. ■



Garrett Wilson



Photo illustration by Michelle Houlden

Apron Strings

Fiction by Donna Gamache

Carefully, Brenda edged the truck alongside Jerry, checked her speed to conform with that of the combine, and waved to her brother to begin dumping. A stream of wheat spilled into the truck box as the two vehicles inched, side by side, down the field.

"I haven't forgotten how to do that, anyway," she muttered to herself. "Maybe they'd find me useful, if I just quit university and stayed home." Then she frowned. Was she that desperate, to throw away all her plans? To disappoint her parents, who had been so delighted to see Brenda start university?

The combine was empty and Jerry waved her away. He seemed so satisfied with his life, happy with all his plans. Why couldn't Brenda feel the same?

Turning the truck, she drove to

where her father waited with the second combine already full. Without Brenda, he would be driving the truck himself, taking only occasional turns on the extra combine, for Brenda's mother had never learned to operate the big truck or the auger.

She climbed out as he set the load to dump. "How's it going, Mike?" she shouted above the racket. She and Jerry had always called him that.

"Good!" he shouted back. "Want to try a round?"

Brenda shook her head. "I'll stick to the truck, thanks. And do some studying in between loads."

"Already hard at the books, eh?"

Brenda nodded, not wanting to mention that in the month she'd spent at university, she'd found it impossible to concentrate. How could she explain the hours wasted, sitting in her room, staring at the multi-floored apartment

buildings that blocked her view?

She smiled wryly to herself, as Mike took a quick check of the hopper. She had always been an outdoors girl at heart. So why was she starting a four-year course designed to make her a teacher?

She couldn't remember consciously deciding on that career. It just seemed to have happened. "I want you to have the chance I never did," her mother had reiterated over the years. Always it had been understood: Brenda would go to university, as Jerry had. Five years older, he had graduated from agriculture and returned to the farm. Why couldn't Brenda do the same?

She recalled once, when she was little, stating emphatically that she intended to farm when she grew up. Yet now she wasn't sure what she wanted. Besides, where would she fit in? Next summer Jerry would marry Christine and carry on with Mike on shares.

Brenda wasn't needed; she would find a different career. The scholarship she had won only confirmed that, and her mother's satisfaction was evident.

The combine clattered. Mike cut the motor and reached for the water jug. "Can you manage unloading? The granary's not too full yet?"

"I can manage. I'll bring the lunch next time."

"Okay." He swung back up on the combine and roared off, the combine like a giant red beetle gorging on the swath.

Brenda watched him go, then headed back for the yard. Above her stretched the hills, yellow and brown in their autumn dress. She had always loved the hills, and spent long afternoons rambling there, searching out the first spring crocus, ripe saskatoons in summer, cranberries in fall.

She'd been away just one month, and yet it felt like forever. How could she face going back to the city?

It wasn't that she didn't like the people there. She'd made several friends, small-town girls or farm girls like herself. But they all seemed thrilled by the city. Nobody else missed home.

The truck empty, Brenda headed for the house.

"Is the lunch ready, Mom?" she called out.

"On the cupboard," her mother answered from the basement. "I packed yours, too. Or do you want to eat here?"

"I'll eat with the men," Brenda called, hoping her mother didn't realize she was avoiding her. If they talked, her mother would sense something was wrong.

"You're homesick," her roommate had suggested, and perhaps she was right, Brenda thought. It wasn't just family and friends that she missed, she realized. It was the farm, more than the people.

The farm—my farm—she called it. But of course it wasn't, and never would be, though it felt like her farm. Not the fields so much, but the hills and river, they were hers. She was the one who rode horseback over bald knolls and into wooded ravines. It was she who searched out beaver dams and mallard nests, swimming holes, and

kingfisher tunnels, deep in the riverbank. And she was the one to instigate skating parties, on those rare occasions when the river froze before the snow fell; when one could skate for miles, upstream or down.

She hadn't realized how much she would miss the place. She hadn't expected to feel this way.

Shaking her head at herself, she drove slowly out to the field. Jerry's hopper must be nearly full again. She drove the truck up beside him and held up the lunch kit, and he brought the lumbering beast to a stop.

"Couple more days, and we should be done," he said, sitting down on the hood of the truck.

"It was too damp last night to keep going, eh?"

"Yes," Jerry said. "And I'd promised Christine to take her to that dance if we couldn't combine."

"So that's where you were when I got home."

He nodded and reached for another sandwich. "How's life in the big city? Seeing the bright lights? Living high on the hog?"

Brenda snorted, ignoring his real question, and avoiding his eyes. "Not much! I never was fond of hogs."

She was aware of his sudden scrutiny. "Feeling a bit lost there, are you?"

Shrugging, Brenda gazed at the hills. She should have known she'd never fool Jerry. "I'm going to quit," she blurted out. "I don't want to go back."

Jerry peered at her. "Anything particular wrong? Don't like your roommate? Your courses? Or what?"

"My roommate's okay. So are my courses. It's nothing particular, just everything. I can't concentrate. I don't feel like eating. I spend all my time wondering what's going on back here."

"You're homesick," Jerry said cheerfully. "I know what that's like."

"You? I remember you used to go to university and stay there. We hardly saw you. You came home maybe once a term."

"You're remembering my last year there, Brenda. By then I knew the place, and Christine was studying in the city, too. My first year was a lot different. Just ask Mom!"

"Ask her what?"

"Ask how big the phone bill was.

And how much they had to put out for bus tickets. I came home almost every weekend. Believe me, I know what being homesick means." He paused. "I should have talked to you about that before you left."

"You missed us that much?"

"Sure, I missed you. But I missed this place, too—the farm, the fields, the feeling you get when you look over it and know it's yours, or sort of yours. Is that how it is with you?"

"Yeah, it's like I've left part of myself behind."

"You have," said Jerry. "You've tried to make the jump to university too quickly. You should have come home sooner, and phoned more often. We thought you were okay there, when you didn't call much."

"I thought I could do it on my own," Brenda protested. "But it's like I'm tied to the farm."

"In a way you are. But that's no reason to quit. Just remember you can come home on weekends. There's nothing wrong with that."

"It's so big there," Brenda said doubtfully. "I feel out of place."

"Maybe you'll always want to live in the country, Jerry said. "In a year or two, you'll know. Meanwhile, spend your weekends here. And your summers. You don't have to cut yourself off like you've been doing."

"You think that will work?"

He nodded. "You can't quit yet. You haven't given it a chance. Later, if you finally decide you belong here, you can look for a job somewhere close."

"I don't know —"

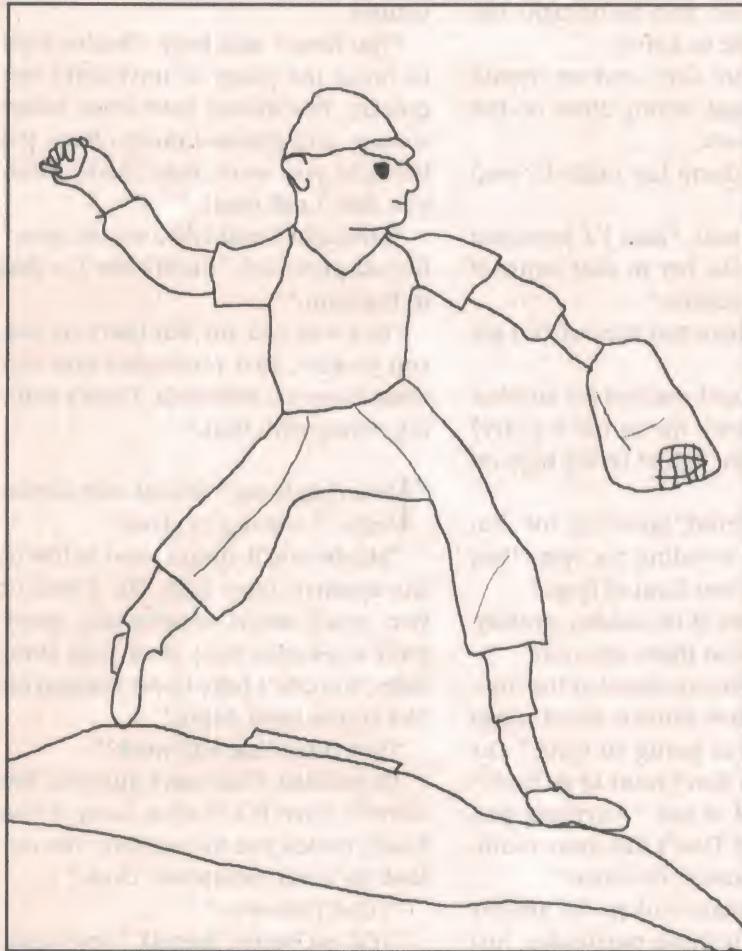
"It'll get better, Brenda," Jerry continued. "I've been through it, remember? Give yourself a chance, or you'll always regret it. Come home weekends; phone often. The farm won't go away. It'll be here waiting, until you want to loosen the strings."

Brenda looked out the truck window, at the rusty swaths, the yellow and brown hills, the glint of river in the distance. She was tied to this place; it was part of her. But Jerry was right. She wasn't ready to quit university yet. She couldn't disappoint Mom and Mike, couldn't disappoint herself, either. If she needed it, the farm was here. Knowing that, she would face the city again. ■



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The Lone Wolf

Elizabeth Toews, 11
Sexsmith, Alta.

The lone wolf in the woods always howls at night
Sometimes he shows his face in daylight
His shaggy coat is a beautiful grey
He has some scratches from killing his prey.
He looks majestic when he howls on the boulder
Telling the old grey owl he is getting older.
He used to have a friend, but now he is gone
With a different pack that travelled on . . .

The Kids' Help Phone is free, it's confidential, and it's 24 hours a day. A friend is always on the other end of the line.

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Tips from a professional storyteller

By Sharon Huntington,
Christian Science Monitor

- Want to tell a story that will keep your listeners on the edge of their seats? Here are some tips from professional storyteller Leticia Pizzino, who lives in Salt Lake City and was recently on a six-week story-telling tour.
- It sounds basic, but every good story has a beginning, a middle and an end. When you begin the story, give enough details about the setting and characters so that listeners can create pictures in their minds. Describe the scene and tell something about the people and the time so that your listeners know where they are.
- Your story should have some kind of challenge or problem for the characters to solve. This is the heart of your story, and it should be something your listeners can understand. Maybe they have had to deal with a similar challenge of their own.
- Even if the setting of your story is another galaxy far, far away, the challenge the characters face should be something your listeners can relate to. It might be helping a friend, choosing between good and evil, getting back home, or finding something that was lost. No matter where the story takes place, it can be about a subject or problem people face in their own lives right here.
- The story must have a good ending. It doesn't have to be a happy ending, although these are the most fun, but it does need to conclude. Don't leave any loose ends. Your listeners should feel a sense of completion when the story is over.
- Many storytellers use various things to help them bring their stories to life. They may add music or sound effects (bells, whistles, drums, even recorded sounds). They might use puppets, props, or costumes to help people imagine what is happening. And letting your audience participate in the story can also make it more fun. (Have them make sound effects, hold props, or sing along.)
- Pick a story you like, because it won't be fun for your listeners if it isn't fun for you. Practice your story, using a tape recorder if you can. Listen to the tape and try to improve. Then, when you're ready, find yourself an audience and take it away!

Life after Death

By Calvin Daniels

The paint job on the renovated truck is not a gleaming blue, but an industrial paint right off the shelf. Yet it has been applied with care. The vehicle reflects workhouse ethics and a passion for preserving the past.

The 1957 Fargo Power Wagon belongs to 18-year-old Steven Chernipeski Jr. of Yorkton, Sask. The truck no longer resembles the ramshackle mess that Chernipeski talked his father into buying for him even before he had his driver's licence.

"There was an old weapons carrier in the Auto Trader I wanted, but Dad wouldn't buy it for me," recalled Steven. The old Fargo his brother, Chris, found sitting at a nearby dealership proved more acceptable.

Steven's \$1,500 acquisition had sat for nearly two decades, after a storied past of service. It had come off the assembly line as a panel truck, and headed into military duty as an ambulance, related Chris.

Once sold from the military, it became a van, transporting workers involved in construction of the Trans-Canada pipeline.

Next, it filtered to a John Deere dealership in Theodore, where the Chernipeskis discovered it. The Fargo had been used there as a tow truck.

Fortunately, by the time Steven got behind the wheel, the flathead six-cylinder motor and power train were still in good working order. The heavy-duty winch that came with the truck 42 years ago still works, too. Because of its utilitarian design, the truck was relatively simple to work on, he said.

"It's basically a tractor," Steven noted. "There was even a three-point hitch available for it at one time."

"There's nothing too sophisticated,"

agreed Chris. "It's all pretty primitive."

Steven found the necessary parts through a specialty store in the United States, although some were also in stock at the local Canadian Tire store. The truck's simplicity is part of its charm, he stressed.

The truck needed a new box. One



Steven Chernipeski Jr. and his 1957 Fargo Power Wagon.

was taken from a Dodge one-ton, but it had to be shortened by a foot. Steven was able to do this during auto body classes at Yorkton Regional High School. It was a class in which he excelled, earning a Saskatchewan gold medal in the provincial skills competition this past spring.

Steven's auto body classes helped when it came to painting the old truck, too. When he got it, it was a rusted yellow. When a sandblaster came to clean one of the family's gravel trucks, he was asked to take the old paint off the Fargo, too.

"He said, 'I can't do that, it will just warp it,'" Chris said. Then they looked at the old truck. "The metal was only one gauge lighter than the gravel box steel," he said.

Admittedly, that made body work a challenge, and a few dents are still visible through the new paint.

"It's not done to a museum quality job, but what's the point of that — it's a tractor," said Chris. "If it was too nice,

you wouldn't want to drive it anywhere."

Tires, too, were an interesting find. The huge 9.00, 16-inch tires from a Winnipeg dealer have manufacture dates stamped on them. One is marked 1944, another 1959.

The Fargo Power Wagon was manufactured until 1979 for export purposes, although the last models were sold in North America in 1969. After that, models no longer met standards here.

The truck has a few interesting features, including the front windshield that pops out an inch at the bottom.

"That's the air conditioning," Steven said with a grin.

The truck has a masculine appeal, undiminished by its lack of such modern conveniences as a radio. Even the four-speed transmission is

bare-bones simple.

"They're straight-cut gears," Chris said. "It's like shifting a highway tractor. You have to double-clutch it, too."

Nor is the truck a speedy mode of transportation. "The gauge says 55, but we had it up to about 45 or 50 and it started getting scary," said Steven.

Why did Steven pick such a monster when most youngsters look for flash and slick style?

"I don't know," he admitted. "I was 15 and I wanted a vehicle that was different, I guess."

After two years of tinkering, he has it. In May, his peers at high school chose the old Fargo the best truck at the annual Show and Shine of student vehicles.





This member of a Regina birdwatching tour is on the lookout for whooping cranes.

By Pat Rediger

Curt Schroeder says his holiday excursions are a bit like treasure hunts. He marks an X on the map, wanders through grasslands, forests and swamps, and sometimes has to do a little "digging" to find what he's looking for.

He is searching for near-extinct whooping cranes, which make brief stopovers in Saskatchewan as they migrate north in the spring and return south in the fall.

Schroeder operates Buffalo Country Ecoventures, specializing in taking visitors on birding adventures throughout the province. Birders from around the world have taken his tours, although there is no guarantee clients will actually see whooping cranes. There are only about 150 migrating birds in the world.

A sight for sore eyes

Schroeder has had good luck, though. "So far there's only been one day tour in which we never saw whooping cranes," he says. And his clients weren't all that disappointed "because there are so many other birds and sites

that can be seen along the way."

Schroeder began his business in Regina three years ago when he was looking for new challenges. He had previously served as executive director of Nature Saskatchewan and frequently escorted members on bird tours. He believed there was an opportunity in extending these types of tours to the general public.

Although the entrepreneur offers a variety of tours, the whooping crane expeditions have become the most popular. He says this is probably because the large birds are very photogenic, with their vibrant white feathers and red crowns. Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to Western Birds* describes the whooper, whose Latin name is *Grus americana*, as "the tallest North American bird, and one of the rarest." This adds to the bird's mystique, and it has



Curt Schroeder



Sask. Tourism

What all the fuss is about: There are only 364 whooping cranes in the world.

become a symbol for conservation. Due to the small population of whooping cranes, most people have no idea where they are apt to be seen.

"On their southward migration during the fall, the whooping cranes travel

about 10 to 25 percent of the way, then stop, rest and feed, and then continue," Schroeder says. "Saskatchewan is right in the middle of that stopover. They spend an extended period of time here and then they leave."

There are six or seven known stopover points in the province for whooping cranes, Schroeder says. In addition to his own reconnaissance, he monitors the Canadian Wildlife Services Whooping Crane Hotline (306-975-5595), meets regularly with other naturalists and receives reports from conservation officers and the RCMP. Armed with this information, he can make a good guess as to where the special visitors might be found. Usually, they are spotted as a family of two or three.

Schroeder's tours are usually a week long. He meets with his clients during the evening at a hotel in Regina, where they map out their strategies for observing the cranes. He takes into account what each visitor wants to see. Some may also be interested in spotting shorebirds, for example. Then he places Xs on his map, charting the next day's destinations.

and camera equipment. Setting out, they cross their fingers.

"There's certainly a challenge to it," says Schroeder. "Sightings are rare, so people are always amazed to see them. It's an uncommon event that they can share when they get home."

Schroeder provides lunch for the group and the members are allowed to linger at each site as they please. Then they travel to another location and once again hope for the best. However, if they do discover whooping cranes at a site, they will likely return several times to observe their new-found feathered friends.

When the day is over, the group stays at a hotel or bed and breakfast. Once again, Schroeder pulls out his map and after consulting with his sources, discusses the options with his customers. "No two trips are ever the same," he says. "We always get together and figure out what sites we want to visit."

Most of his clients have come from outside Saskatchewan, especially the United States. Last year, a photographer from Taiwan who specializes in cranes took two tours within a month.

A Taiwanese camera crew, which was filming a feature on the photographer, accompanied him on one of the tours.

"We found a very good spot for the camera crew," Schroeder recalls. "Whooping crane footage is very rare — most of it is 20 years old and was shot by biologists. This was a very positive experience for everyone."

He emphasizes that his tours are not designed merely to catch a glimpse of the elusive whooping crane. He also provides educational information on the various birds that exist in Saskatchewan and discusses the crucial role of humans in ensuring their survival.

"The land of living skies is our province's tourism slogan and it's very appropriate," Schroeder says. "Our skies are a natural wonder to behold with so many bird species to see. The whooping cranes are just one part of it."

Rarity is only one of the things that makes whoopers special

By Florence Cardinal

The bird glides on wind currents, spirals upward to incredible heights, plummets earthward, then soars aloft again.

The whooping crane has a wingspan of more than seven feet and is the tallest bird in North America. It is magnificent, with its snowy white plumage, black "moustache" and naked red crowned head. Early in the morning, its distinctive bugle call echoes for miles through the wilderness.

Grus americana, the whooping crane, is extremely rare. In the early 1940s, when civilization began encroaching on nesting areas, its population dropped to a low of 15. Then the National Audubon Society started a concerted effort to save the birds.

"The Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, through its director, Fred Bard, was instrumental in promoting the plight of the whooping cranes to Canadians," says Brian Johns, whooping crane co-ordinator for the Canadian Wildlife Service in Saskatoon, Sask.

At that time, the nesting grounds of the whooping crane were unknown. They were "discovered by accident in a remote corner of Wood Buffalo Park in 1954," Johns said.

Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada's largest park, straddles the border between Alberta and North West Territories. It is made up of several topographical areas, including the 400-square-kilometre Salt Plains, Pine Lake (five spring-fed sinkholes), and the 4,000-square-kilometre Peace-Athabasca Delta. The whooping crane nesting area is 150 km north of the delta. The breeding area is in the Marl Ponds, just west of Fort Smith.

Whooping cranes usually mate for life. After an elaborate courting ritual, the birds build a three-foot nest and the female lays two eggs. Both birds take turns incubating them. "The eggs are laid about three days apart, but incubation starts immediately, so the eggs

will hatch about two days apart," Johns explains. This interval allows the first chick to gain strength before the second one hatches. The first chick is, therefore, dominant. This puts stress on the second chick and sometimes it does not survive.

"In addition," he says, "the pair is usually ready to leave the nest pond a couple of days after hatching, and it is sometimes difficult for the younger chick to keep up." Moreover, a period

DURING THEIR FALL MIGRATION TO THE GULF OF MEXICO, WHOOPERS STOP FOR SEVERAL WEEKS TO FATTEN UP ON WASTE GRAIN IN THE STUBBLE FIELDS OF SOUTHERN SASKATCHEWAN.

of cool, wet weather shortly after hatching sometimes causes the death of one of the chicks, usually the younger. The nest is built over water or on a small island. This gives the chicks a better chance of evading predators. The young birds can swim as soon as they hatch, but are unable to fly until they are 80 to 90 days old.

In the fall, whooping cranes migrate to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge near Corpus Christi, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico. This is a journey of 5,500 kilometres. During the migration, the birds stop for several weeks to fatten up on waste grain in the stubble fields of southern Saskatchewan.

"Whoopers arrive at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast in late October and leave in mid-April," says Wendee Holtcamp, a freelance writer who has toured the refuge. She describes it as a 70,504-acre peninsula with scattered blackjack oaks inland and tidal ponds along the coast. The brackish water is intersected by fingers of salt-tolerant grasses and other vegetation. The cranes spread out through the wetland vegetation, feeding on the abundant clams and crabs.

"Visitors can follow a paved road tour, hike along several trails, visit an interpretive centre, view whoopers

from a 40-foot observation tower, or take a commercial boat tour to spot whooping cranes and other shorebirds in their tidal habitat," Holtcamp says.

The biggest factor leading to the near extinction of whooping cranes has been human encroachment on their natural environment. Air pollution, acid rain, water pollution and deforestation have taken a toll and every year, several birds die in collisions with power lines, despite attempts to mark these sites.

The Canadian Wildlife Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife are co-operating in an effort to preserve these beautiful birds. Wood Buffalo Park and Aransas Wildlife Refuge are under government protection, as is the migration route. Anyone caught killing or molesting the cranes faces stiff penalties. Still, some birds are killed. Three were shot by hunters in 1990-91.

Even in Aransas, whooping cranes are not safe. Commercial barges plying the waters of the Gulf of Mexico are a constant threat. An oil or chemical spill could have disastrous consequences.

Wildlife officials are always trying new means to increase the whooping crane population. At the Calgary Zoo in Alberta and in Wisconsin and Maryland, biologists are attempting to raise whoopers in captivity. The eggs are incubated by whooping cranes, sandhill cranes and sometimes by artificial means. Thanks to the efforts of wildlife experts from both sides of the border and the many citizens who donate time and money, whooping cranes now have a chance for survival. The population of the birds now stands at 260 wild and 104 captive birds. The world's 364 whooping cranes appear to have a better future than the tiny flock of 15 that existed in the 1940s.

The quilt that built a church

History by Darlene Polachic

Around 1907, a group of British settlers took up homesteads near the village of Rama, in east-central Saskatchewan. Most of them were Protestants eager to establish regular corporate worship for themselves and their children, and they soon formed an inter-denominational group that became known as



The pioneer church and some of the congregation, c. 1910.

the Rama Pioneer Sunday School.

At first, church services were held in homes, but since there were only two houses large enough to accommodate everyone, it soon became evident that the congregation needed a building of its own.

The church became a community project. The site, handily located along the main road to Rama, was donated by a Mr. Nichol. The men of the congregation set to work cutting logs from the plentiful natural supply.

According to Donald Dean, the son of one of the pioneer families, the structure was rectangular with log walls and a shingled roof and gable ends. It had two windows on each side and a door and one window at the front. The floor was made of six-inch boards with a raised platform at the far end.

Built during the winter of green logs—some peeled, some unpeeled—it wasn't the soundest of structures. It also had a poor foundation, but it served its purpose.

The cost of the church building was minimal. The logs were there for the cutting, but shingles and finishing materials had to be purchased. With no budget for such amenities, the pioneers devised a clever fund raising project. They made a quilt.

Within the Pioneer Sunday School membership were the Murrays, newly arrived from Kent, England, where John Murray had been a coachman, and his wife, Fanny, a lady's maid. They had arrived in

Canada in April, 1907. Their group was sponsored by the Salvation Army, which arranged passage as well as a six-month period of agricultural training for the would-be farmers.

The Murrays had spent their six months of farm orientation near Hamiota, Man. When they got to the Rama area, it was early November, not the best time of year to take possession of a totally undeveloped homestead.

However, the settlement agent had arranged a shelter for them: a shack the size of a railway car, covered on the outside with tarpaper. Flour bags dyed green divided the tiny space into two rooms. Two iron double beds were placed head-to-head at one end. The three young Murray boys slept in one bed; John and Fanny and their youngest, Constance, in the other. Four-year-old Jean had a bunk over the

What Strange Alphabet

Quilts read,
Studied, written on;
Quilts gathering dust,
Whites yellowing,
Seams splitting;
Quilts missing stitches,
Ohio stars fading
Like the close of day.

Quilts, attracting,
Repelling, confusing,
Hypnotizing, warming the heart,
Pleasing the eye,
Draw tears for the past,
Lift spirits for unborn memories
That will fade
Like dye.

Quilts forgotten in
Basement boxes,
Attic windows, and
Dark-cornered sheds;
Quilts that tell a story
With a Lancaster rose
And a ladder for Jacob.

What strange alphabet,
What grand handiwork
Like people who quilt
Through winter with
Cotton.

— Dan Lukiv

foot of one of the beds. The family lived in the tarpaper shack for nearly three years before they had cut and peeled enough logs to build a proper house.

Despite their own hardships, the Murrays had become involved in the Pioneer congregation, and Fanny was to play a significant role in the fund raising project.

Back in England, Fanny's sister Martha was married to a tailor, George Poulter. He obligingly supplied Fanny with some swatch books for suit fabrics. The 811 square samples represented the available suiting materials of the day and ranged from sombre serges and worsteds to flashy plaids and butter-yellow pinstripes.

The fabric squares were cut in half, and for the price of ten cents, donors could have their names embroidered on a block. The idea was to put the embroidered blocks together in a quilt.

The community rallied enthusiastically behind the project. Some purchased their own square; others shared the cost and their names appear together on a block. A passing law enforcement officer made a donation, but no one thought to ask his name and his square simply reads: R.N.W.M.P. Some paid 10 cents on behalf of their pets: one block is inscribed: Mr. and Mrs. Botell, Muriel Dean, and Rover.

The centre of the quilt was ornamented with an elaborately embroidered motif. The words "Rama Pioneer Sunday School 1908" were embroidered within a chain-stitched circle. An English rose, Scottish thistle, Irish shamrock, and Canadian maple leaf were added to honor the pioneer settlers' roots and affirm their new home, as well.

No one remembers, anymore, who did the embroidery work, or who pieced the blocks together with careful herringbone stitches. Nor is there a record of the women who finished and tied the quilt with bright red yarn. However, there are several recollections about the concert and the box social at which the quilt was auctioned off. By all accounts, it was very well attended. John Berg was the auctioneer and Charlie Lockhart had a concession, at which he sold five-cent bags of candy and



Mark Polachic, the great-grandson of Fanny Murray, studies the Rama Pioneer Sunday School quilt, which is on display in the Foam Lake, Sask., museum.

peanuts to the children.

The quilt brought \$12. It was purchased by Mrs. Dean, who gave it as a wedding gift to John Dean and Caroline Richardson, the first couple to be married in the Pioneer Sunday School church. According to records, the newlyweds drove away from the Pioneer church in a big wagon drawn by a team of oxen.

The young Deans lived most of their lives in Foam Lake, Sask., where John managed the creamery. Caroline eventually gave the quilt to her sister-in-law, Muriel Dean Gudmundson, who donated it to the Foam Lake Museum. It remains on display there, in excellent condition, and provides a priceless record of the area's pioneer roots.

The money raised by the quilt project was used to finish the church building. The roof was shingled and windows were installed. A wood heater was purchased to warm the interior.

A popular story involving the heater features Gladstone Ferrie, a church member who later went on to represent the MacKenzie Constituency as a Member of Parliament from 1949 to 1953. A young bachelor in those days, "Glad" Ferrie willingly took his turn going to church early on Sunday morning to light the fire so the room would be warm by service time. On one occasion, he got the fire going, but no one showed up for church. After waiting for some time, Glad decided to go to the

nearest neighbor to see what had happened. It turned out it was Monday. In looking after himself, the young bachelor had lost track of the days.

John and Fanny Murray's daughter Jean had vivid memories of the Pioneer Sunday School. "Services were going on there in 1912," she wrote in a letter to a niece. "I was 10. Mr. Berg from Rama, Albert Walker, and Jack Meakin acted as lay preachers. Mr. Berg brought the sad news of the sinking of the Titanic. As it was going down the band played 'Nearer My God To Thee,' so we sang that hymn that Sunday."

The church thrived until the First World War, when many of the local men joined the war effort. Attendance dropped dramatically. As well, churches of other denominations had sprung up, and the Rama Pioneer Sunday School decided it was time to disband.

It had been sitting vacant for several years by 1920, when a prairie fire burned the little log church building to the ground. Only the organ and stove were saved.

As Donald Dean put it: "Many happy times were spent [in the church] bringing pioneers together in fellowship. We are sure it served its purpose and leaves a lot of memories of those people who lived in the district at that time."

(Saskatoon writer Darlene Polachic is the granddaughter of John and Fanny Murray.)

Of spiders, birds and lilies

Column No. 1,563 by Doug Gilroy

Not many people like spiders, yet, like birds, mammals, fish and plants, they have a distinct place in nature. To study the various species and their habits is very interesting, if one is so inclined. The yellow spider pictured on the stem of a blue iris is the only one of these spiders I have ever seen. It is known as a crab spider. A common name is goldenrod spider or flower spider.

According to *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders*, this arachnid can change color to blend in with whatever plant it happens to be on.

Elmer Anderson of Shaunavon, Sask., a longtime reader of this column, has asked about some birds he saw in the spring. They were black except for a red patch on the chest.

I would guess these were rose-breasted grosbeaks. He was fortunate to see about a dozen of them. I haven't seen one for three or four years.

John Pawlivsky of Edmonton, Alta., often visits his brother Peter's farm at Rabbit Lake, Sask. He says there are about 20 bird houses at Peter's and in one of them bluebirds nest every year. This year the bluebirds hatched five chicks, but tragedy struck when crops surrounding the bluebirds' house were sprayed to kill weeds.

When Pawlivsky checked several days later, he found five, fully feathered bluebirds dead. He found a similar scenario nearby in the tree swallows' birdhouse, where six birds, almost fully feathered, lay dead.

For days after he removed the dead birds, their parents kept circling the respective houses and sitting on them — but not entering them. He shared in their sorrow.



Crab spider, also called goldenrod or flower spider.

Peter never uses herbicides or insecticides on the superb garden he grows yearly. None of the other young birds in the yard were affected, because the nests and bird houses are close to his house and were not affected by the spray. "So what are people doing?" he asks. "Poisoning not only our precious wildlife but poisoning themselves."

Joyce Hagemann of Ponoka, Alta., thinks the bird mentioned in Column No. 1,557 (June 24) by the Clarkes in Moosomin, Sask., could have been a Western tanager. "The immature ones can fool you," she says. She is likely correct. She has had juncos stay at her feeder all winter, which is quite unusual.

Elmer Wium of Tappen, B.C., is an osprey fan. A photo clipped from a local paper shows an osprey hovering over its nest on a power pole. The nest was relocated from a nearby hydro pole prior to the birds' arrival from winter migration, as the old nest was causing electric shorts and there was concern for the safety

of the birds. Evidently the osprey family accepted their new venue.

Marilyn Fairbrother, who lives in lovely Comox, B.C., enjoys watching the comings and goings of a rufous hummingbird. The nest, built close to the kitchen window, contained two little ones. Her son, Brian, took an excellent photo of the bird on the nest. Hummingbirds make such beautiful nests, decorated and covered with bits of lichens.

Shirley Thompson, of Biealfait, Sask., took issue with a recent column in which I mentioned transplanting a western red lily. She would not want to encourage people to go out and pick large bouquets, she says.

I agree this is inadvisable, though I don't think it does any harm to transplant one or two plants. Unfortunately, when one picks a lily, often the stem doesn't break off. Then the whole plant is pulled up, bulb and all. And that's the end of the plant. It's best to just admire wildflowers instead of picking. ■

PEANUTS



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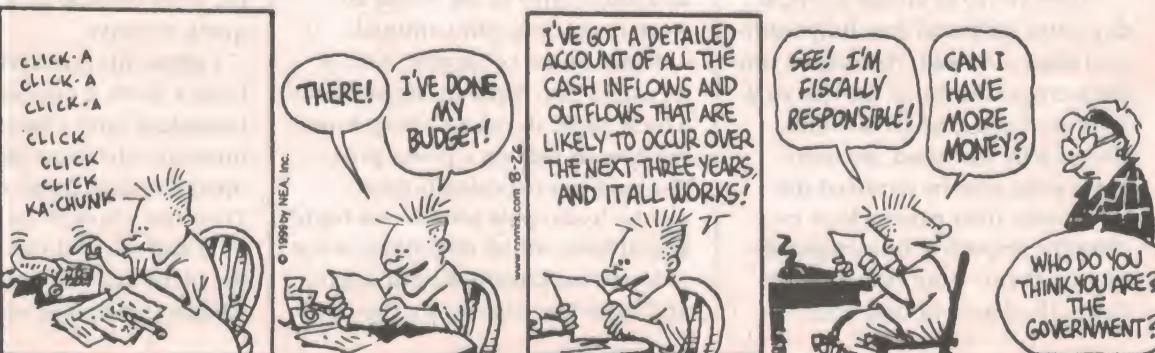
For BETTER or for WORSE



GARFIELD

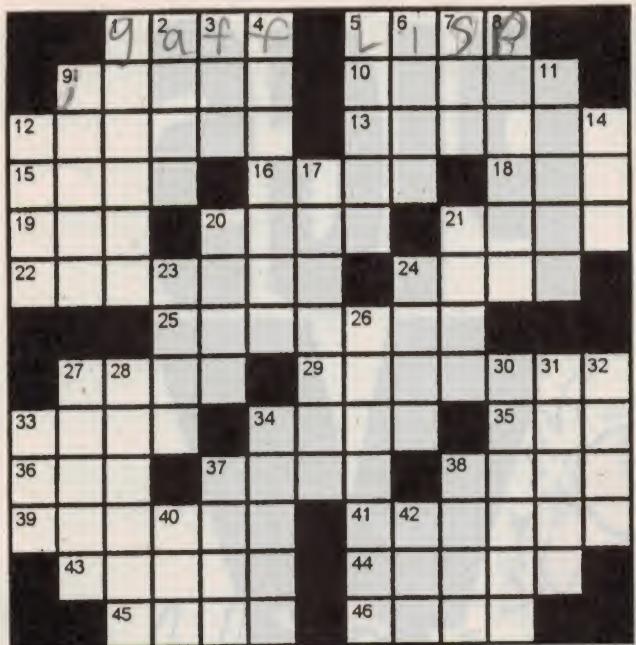


BETTY



Canadian Criss Cross

by Walter D. Feener



ACROSS

1. Fisherman's helper
5. Thpeak like thith
9. Singer Iglesias
10. Commonplace
12. Half a pfennig
13. Population count
15. Without others
16. Noxious Biblical weed
18. Dernier
19. Lowest number
20. Raise to the third power
21. Female servant
22. Old World constrictors
24. Glabrous
25. "Rigby" (Beatles song)
27. Meet defiantly
29. Midday meals
33. Stanley Gardner
34. Additional
35. Unclose: Lit.
36. Near the ground
37. Gingivae
38. Company of sailors
39. Threshes grain
41. Avoids capture
43. French secondary school
44. Ceremonies

45. Transmit
46. Painter Tanguy

24. Skeleton piece
26. Infant's room

27. Whimsically humorous
28. Without exception

DOWN

1. Esophagus
2. Join by treaty
3. For shame!
4. Good luck
5. Monetary reward
6. Understanding words
7. Hot star
8. One newton per square meter
9. Female donkey
11. Garishly red
12. Croquet wicket
14. Comedian Caesar
17. David's son
20. Composer Porter
21. Grapes residue
23. This place
30. Crowds
31. Rapiers
32. Attaches buttons
33. Christmas worker
34. Meditated in silence
37. Secluded valley
38. Pleasingly pretty
40. Frozen water
42. Actress Ullman



MAILBOX

Listings are free but only run once. Please be brief. Issues are prepared three weeks in advance of publication date. Send info to: Mailbox, Western People, Box 2500, Saskatoon S7K 2C4.

Wanted: Old patterns for complete kits for crewel stitch Christmas stockings. Please write first if price involved. — Janice Gooding, Box 34, R.R. 3, Site 2, Regina, Sask. S4P 2Z3.

Looking for: The descendants of James Dalgarno and his first wife Jenni Munn, and second wife Margaret McCallum who left Bruce County, Ontario about 1907 and went to Leduc, Alta. Contact: Mary I. MacKay, R.R. 2, Dobbinton, Ont. N0H 1L0, 519-353-5540.

Wanted: Pattern of a bedspread in the form of a large star with small points that covers the whole top of a large bed. — Corinne Prescott, 100 Bristol Ave., Winnipeg, Man. R2H 2R4.

Wanted: Copies of cross stitch patterns such as animals, houses, barns or anything you have. Will pay for copying and postage. — Joan Amyotte, P.O. Box 1136, Indian Head, Sask. SOG 2K0.

Wanted: Trixie Belden books especially titles #21-30 and #17-20. Will pay a good price. Please write first. — Laura Riste, P.O. Box 28, Jenner, Alta. T0J 1W0.

Plunkett reunion 2000, July 28-30, 2000, including the surrounding school districts of Plunkett, Glynfield, Badger, Eltham, Farina, Golden Hill, Clover Bar and Easterlea. If you or your family or anyone who lived in the Plunkett community have not been contacted and are interested in attending, please send names and addresses to: Plunkett Reunion, P.O. Box 11, Plunkett, Sask. S0K 3J0, or phone Barb, 306-944-4227 or Janet, 306-944-4945.

Wanted: Poem, When Papa Papered the Parlor. — Richard Harvey, P.O. Box 132, Hanna, Alta. T0J 1P0.

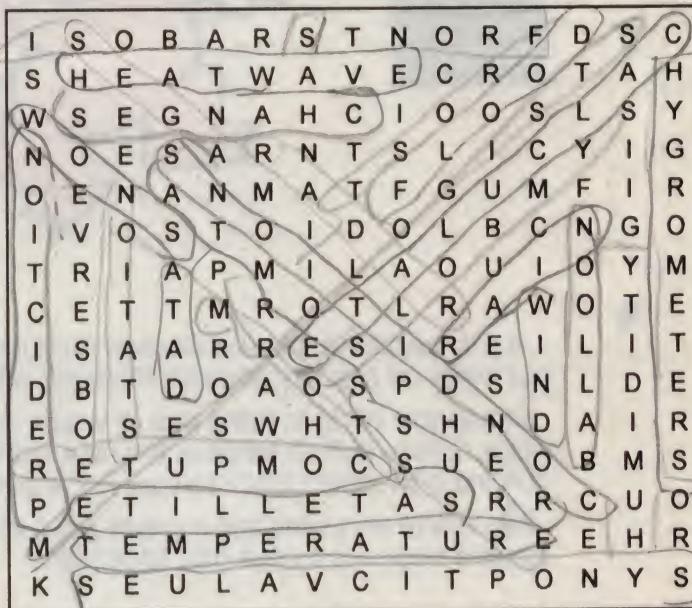
Wanted: Book, Live Fast, Die Young and Leave a Good Looking Corpse, from 1950-60. It is the story of a boy who was an altar boy at the age of 12, and died in the electric chair at the age of 21. — Hans Anderson, P.O. Box 537, Shellbrook, Sask. S0J 2E0.

Wanted: Information on the Jake Wiebe family, who was a teacher in Renfrew School, Sask. in the 30s, and later where his children Wilbert, Ruby and Maryless went. Thank you if anyone can let me know of those children. — Mrs. Mary (Thiessen) Bueckert, P.O. Box 136, Cleardale, Alta. T0H 3Y0.

WEATHER FORECASTING

Word Find puzzle
by Janice M. Peterson

When all the words in the list have been found, the letters left over will spell the solution.



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Atmosphere

Balloon

Calculate

Changes

Changes

Computer

Conditions

Data

Flood

Fronts

Frost

Heatwave

Humidity

Hygrometers

Images

Isobars

Meteorologists

Observe

Prediction

Pressure

Radar

Rain

Satellite

Snow

Station

Storm

Symbols

Synoptic Values

Temperature

Wind

Solution
(19
letters):

Scientific
work
gases

WHEN PIGS FLY

Three cartoon pigs with wings are flying through large letters spelling "WHEN PIGS FLY". One pig is in the foreground, another is in the middle, and a smaller one is above them. The letters are black and have a white outline.

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